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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA, AF

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [SU](#) [IT](#) [EUN](#) [IAEA](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL PESSIMISTIC ON MIDDLE EAST, SUDAN

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Classified By: A/DCM Tom Countryman for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. DCM hosted a lunch in honor of MFA Under Secretary for the Middle East and Africa Alfredo Mantica and

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his Chief of Staff Paola Imperiale, along with Pol M/C and Poloff, on September 8 . Mantica presented a fairly pessimistic outlook for the situations in Iraq, Iran, and Sudan. On Iraq, he found it hard to envision a greater EU role in the near future. On Iran and Sudan, he stressed the need for broader strategic visions. Mantica, as has become the norm in our encounters with Italian government officials, took the opportunity to raise Italy's concerns about UN Security Council reform. End summary.

Skeptical on EU Role in Iraq

¶2. (C) Mantica noted that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recent remarks that Iraq would not be ready for elections by January are not helpful and play into terrorists' hands. He was skeptical that the EU, with 25 member states with "deep differences," would be able to achieve consensus on EU support for the UN in Iraq. At the recent informal meeting of Foreign Ministers in Maastricht, he said, member states finally agreed, but only after much negotiation, to provide EU training for Iraqi security forces, but it was unclear how this would develop in practical terms (the Germans offered money, the French schools, and the Italians on-the-ground training).

¶3. (C) Based on the difficulties surrounding this less problematic issue, he said he had "no idea" how the EU could ever agree to providing the 4,200 soldiers necessary for UN protection. There were no formal discussions on this topic at Maastricht and it would be a long time before the EU would be able to provide a complete political answer, he said. Mantica commented that even NATO had found it difficult to reach consensus on its role in Iraq, despite the initial enthusiasm generated by the surge in transatlantic goodwill at Normandy. DCM replied that he hoped the EU would accelerate its decision to support the UN in Iraq because the "political clock is ticking" and the UN has the necessary expertise for providing election support. The decision shouldn't be made for the UN because of the inability or unwillingness of the international community to provide protection and financial support in a timely manner.

Iran -- Facing up to political realities

¶4. (C) Mantica argued that Iran views its nuclear program as necessary to becoming a regional power. In Tehran's mindset (which Mantica deemed a very coherent rationale), because it is surrounded by countries like Pakistan, India, and Israel that already have nuclear weapons, Iran sees no reason to limit its own nuclear ambitions. DCM argued back that we need to change this way of thinking and convince Tehran that pursuing a nuclear weapons program will only freeze Iran out of the international community and make their situation worse. Mantica replied that Iran is a special case. Its motivation stems not from the usual Arab rhetoric blaming the rest of the world for its problems, but from a sense of unusually strong national pride and "empire" that dictates that Tehran be recognized as a regional power. Mantica noted that one way Iran can gain international respect is by playing an active and constructive role in stabilizing Iraq.

¶5. (C) Another problem, Mantica continued, is knowing "which Iran" we are talking about. He agreed with Pol M/C's assertion that dealing with reformers like Khatami is not effective because they do not hold the power in Iran. Reform efforts have failed, Mantica argued, noting that, paradoxically, the dismal civil society situation (rampant drug abuse, prostitution, etc.) blatantly contradicts the fundamentalist values that Iranian leadership is trying to promote. Italy had hoped that Khatami would be able to change this situation, and that internal reforms would help resolve Iran's external difficulties, but it was clear even

before the recent parliamentary elections that he had been unsuccessful. Mantica said that Italy and Europe had now

come to the realization that the reformist experiment was over and it is time to face new political realities in Iran, with eyes wide open. The problem, though, is who to trust now.

¶16. (C) Mantica said the EU3 initiative was unproductive and that eventually France, Germany, and the UK would stop trying to be the "head of the class" and let the Iran issue be dealt with in the larger EU context where, in Italy's eyes, it belongs. Responding to DCM's inquiry as to whether the EU is ready to refer Iran's noncompliance with the IAEA to the UN Security Council, Mantica said he didn't know. The problem with consensus, he said, is that you have to go with the least common denominator. Logically, however, he opined, the answer should be yes, since France holds a veto in the Security Council.

Another plea on UN Security Council Reform

¶17. (C) Taking advantage of the opening on UNSC issues, Mantica asked (somewhat rhetorically) why the US didn't help Italy. DCM responded that the USG -- including President Bush -- is aware of the Italian position, reiterating the USG position that the US criterion is effectiveness. Mantica replied that the problem involves more than just the security council, where one more vote won't make a difference, but the entire UN system. The UN, he said, was born with a certain political character that it was time to revisit. His personal view was that the UN plays the role of honest broker, but not that of a world government where a few countries decide the fate of the others.

Sudan -- Need to look at the big picture

¶18. (C) On Sudan, Mantica agreed that the humanitarian crisis in Darfur was the most immediate priority. However, he stressed that a long-term political solution to the crisis would only be possible by addressing the broader north-south political problem in Sudan as a whole. The Abuja peace talks are an important attempt to reach an overall political solution, he said, but we must convince the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to be honest about their willingness to integrate the south in a united Sudan. Mantica opposed the SPLM's proposal for three militaries (African Union, Sudanese government, and SPLM soldiers) to serve as peacekeepers in Darfur, arguing that a unified military presence is needed to avoid a full-scale civil war. Furthermore, he opined, it is difficult to explain peace-keeping to Africans.

¶19. (C) Mantica also agreed with the US draft resolution on Sudan, but said that not even sanctions will help resolve the situation. He was convinced that the Khartoum government was even more a victim of events than those who had caused them. The important thing, he stressed, is not to cut off discussions.

¶110. (C) Regarding the November 19-21 Great Lakes conference involving Foreign Ministers and Heads of State, Mantica said that Rwanda and Uganda are opposed to Angola's participation. The Netherlands (as a party to the conference, not in its role as EU President) is trying to find a compromise.

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